



CONNECTICUT
LEGAL
RIGHTS
PROJECT, INC.

TESTIMONY OF KATHLEEN FLAHERTY, ESQ.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CT LEGAL RIGHTS PROJECT, INC.
HOUSING COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING
FEBRUARY 18, 2020

In Opposition to:

**SB 107: AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE CONCERNING VARIOUS ISSUES
AT HOMELESS SHELTERS**

Support with Concerns:

SB 105: AN ACT ESTABLISHING A RIGHT TO HOUSING

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**SB 109: AN ACT CONCERNING A LANDLORD'S ABILITY TO CONSIDER THE
CRIMINAL RECORD OF PROSPECTIVE TENANTS**

**HB 5122: AN ACT CONSIDERING CONSIDERATION OF CRIMINAL CONVICTIONS
OF A PROSPECTIVE TENANT**

**HB 5120: AN ACT REQUIRING HOUSING AUTHORITIES TO PROVIDE VOTER
REGISTRATION APPLICATIONS TO PROSPECTIVE TENANTS**

**HB 5124: AN ACT REQUIRING LANDLORDS TO NOTIFY TENANTS OF
FORECLOSURE PROCEEDINGS**

**HB 5129: AN ACT CONCERNING A TRANSITION PROGRAM FOR
INCARCERATED PERSONS BEING RELEASED FROM PRISON**

Senator Anwar, Representative McGee, Senator Hwang, Representative Zullo and distinguished members of the Housing Committee:

Good afternoon. My name is Kathy Flaherty and I'm the Executive Director of Connecticut Legal Rights Project (CLRP), a statewide non-profit agency that provides legal services to low income adults with serious mental health conditions. CLRP was established in 1990 pursuant to a

Consent Order which mandated that the state provide funding for CLRP to protect the civil rights of DMHAS clients who are hospitalized, as well as those clients who are living in the community. I'm also the Co-Chair of the Keep the Promise Coalition (KTP). KTP is a coalition of advocates (people living with mental health conditions, family members, mental health professionals and interested community members) with a vision of a state in which people with mental health conditions are able to live successfully in the community because they have access to housing and other community-based supports and services that are recovery oriented, person-driven and holistic in their approach to wellness. Lastly, I'm a member of the steering committee of the Connecticut Cross Disability Lifespan Alliance, an alliance of people of all ages with all disabilities who pursue a unified agenda.

SB 105: I am concerned that this existing language may establish a "right to shelter," which has not effectively reduced homelessness in our neighbor states (Massachusetts and New York). Connecticut's homeless service providers have developed a strategy that is working towards the goal of making homelessness rare, brief and on-time by 2023. As a legal aid lawyer, I know the difference that legal representation in eviction cases makes in terms of preventing homelessness. In CLRP's experience, virtually all of our clients for whom we have opened a housing case either maintained or had access to housing when their cases were closed. Perhaps this committee should consider establishing a pilot 'right to counsel' program in one of the state's housing courts.

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SB 107: A task force is not necessary to address the issues. Shelter providers should follow existing state and federal fair housing laws.

SB 109, HB 5122: We support bills that increase access to housing for people with criminal records. People should not be denied housing forever as a collateral consequence of prior actions. I urge this committee to look at the recommendations of the Council established pursuant to PA 19-142.

HB 5120: We support efforts to encourage all CT residents to register to vote and participate in the political process. I simply note that there are often long wait lists for applicants for public housing, which means that providing information at the time of application may not make sense.

HB 5124: Tenants should be informed if their landlord is under foreclosure. However, I'm not sure that allowing tenants to file for a receivership of rents will be helpful; if the rent is collected by someone else, the landlord may not be able to save the property.

HB 5129: It is not clear that the proposed language will accomplish the purpose of this bill which is to avoid a release from DOC into homelessness. What is the purpose of a mental health assessment six months prior to release from prison if it is not accompanied by a timely referral to available services? Also the homeless service system is not currently designed for referrals six months before one might actually be literally homeless. The federal definition of homelessness specifically excludes people who are in institutions more than 90 days.